



## The Sea is a Deceitful Thing

*Anna Glynn*

On the day our respective law firms announced we'd be working from home, my husband proposed we devote all our new free time to becoming better people.

"I'm telling you, it's a gift," David said. My stomach clenched. Dinner was one of his heroic masculine endeavors; a steak smothered in bacon cream, with a single potato chip on the side. As we ate, he propped his iPad upright on our kitchen table, displaying a spreadsheet divided into a confusing blur of colors.

"We can use these hours to be productive in ways unimaginable before."

I discretely spat a piece of half-gnawed gristle into my napkin.

"I already work full-time," I said.

David's jaw tightened, and I could see he'd simmer on a slow boil until we went head-to-head as to why on earth I'd refuse this golden opportunity for personal growth.

"Promise me you'll try," he insisted, with the same earnest blue-eyed gaze I'd found so irresistible when we met five years ago. Back then, I'd loved David's restless energy and his tall, manly stride. After growing up on a diet of Disney fairytales, I'd believed that opposites attract and his extroverted nature seemed to compliment my scaredy-cat soul.

"I'll tackle 'Moby Dick'," I said, reluctant to argue.

That was six months ago. David kept his side of the bargain. A stack of twenty biographies sat in his corner of the bedroom. He developed decent conversational skills in Japanese. And, he upped his running regimen to the point his time was good enough to qualify for the next Boston Marathon.

I, on the other hand, spent this "gift" of unscheduled time by watching crap on Netflix. And my expensive leather-bound edition of "Moby Dick," with gilded pages sewn into the binding, never budged from the coffee table.

In my bedroom, there was a cupola that echoed rumblings from street traffic outside our home. The rushing noises floated down from the ceiling, like erratic breaths from a whale's blowhole. Some days, after spending hours on legal briefs, I'd scroll through bad news about the pandemic, civic tensions, fires, conspiracy theories, and more. Then I'd shut my laptop and crawl under the sheets, feeling swallowed up by a ravenous beast.

One night after brushing my teeth, David sat up in bed.

"You should get evaluated." He pulled up a website. "Here's a list of therapists. They're all online." He laid his iPad on my pillow.

“I don’t need help.” I shoved it back over to his side of the bed. “I’m fine.”

“When’s the last time you exercised?” He scrunched up his nose as though I’d contaminated the bed. He turned his back to me, switching off his bedside light. “You didn’t keep your word.” His voice was like acid.

I quietly seethed. Evidently, I was not only depressed, but I was also a lazy liar. I kicked the duvet from my legs. Deep down, I had a niggling worry that maybe David was right, and if I didn’t start improving, I’d be doomed to feel sad and sorry for myself forever. After a few silent minutes, I turned to my side, struggling to get comfortable.

“I’ll start swimming tomorrow,” I said, already dreading the shock of cold water against my skin.

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The next morning, I pulled on my old Speedo. It was a laughably tight fit, cutting into my butt. Then I drove west towards The Cove, parking on a dead-end street. The autumn air was warm and moist as I hurried past the maskless tourists hogging the benches on the coastal footpath above the sandstone cliffs. I hooked my duffle bag on the concrete wall by the lifeguard tower. Holding my breath from the pelican stink, I weaved through the crowds towards the shore.

The whitewash rolled high onto the beach. I waded into the water, the chill immediately squeezing my chest. Caught in the undertow, the sandy bottom gave way and I had no choice but to swim.

For a few minutes, I focused on slowing down my rapid, shallow breathing. Muscle memory set in, and I smoothed out my desperate strokes. Soon the sea lion barks began to fade as I headed for open water.

Then, the big waves came.

The power from the first one knocked me flat. My eyes stinging from saltwater, I tried to catch my breath. Then the second wave crashed, tumbling me twice. Stunned, I attempted to lift my arms. Drifting closer to the sharp rocks, I just managed to duck under the next wave.

I frantically wiped out my goggles. But before I could readjust the straps, the rising surge exposed me to the next wave’s crest. With no time to brace myself, it pummeled the back of my head. Climbing an imaginary ladder, I barely surfaced, desperate to keep my mouth above the choppy water. I realized the next set would smash me against the knifelike reef. Growing tired, the world became quiet, and I started to sink.

Then something inside me snapped. *I will not accept drowning.* Through blurry eyes, I made out a speck of bright green.

Filling my lungs with sweet air like balloons, I flipped onto my back. Backstroking furiously, I made it past the break. Then I stopped, waving my arm side-to-side.

“Help!” I shrieked. My voice must have carried on the wind, because a kayaker paddled towards me. Exhausted, I latched onto the side of his boat.

“Didn’t expect that,” I coughed, tasting saltwater and bile. “Those monster swells came out of nowhere.”

“Almost didn’t see you,” he said, tossing me his lifejacket. “It’s beautiful out here, but sometimes, the sea can be a deceitful thing.”

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Later, showered, robed, and curled up on my couch, I heard David come home after his long run.

“You didn’t swim, did you?” he called out.

“I decided this is a great time for doing nothing,” I said, turning another page of “Moby Dick,” taking pleasure in every word.

